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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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BASIC WATERFOWL HUNTING REGULATIONS ANNOUNCED

Anticipating a fall flight of a bumper crop of wild ducks and geese from their Canadian breeding grounds, the Fish and Wildlife Service will allow American hunters 10 to 15 additional shooting days in three flyways this year under new basic regulations for the 1955-56 hunting season announced today by Acting Secretary of the Interior Clarence A. Davis.

The ban on baiting remains in effect.

Flights on all flyways are expected to be the best since 1952, the Fish and Wildlife Service said.

The Federal regulations specify the length of the shooting seasons by flyways, bag and possession limits, and shooting hours, but do not include the specific season dates for the various States.

Based on the number of days allotted to each flyway, the specific dates will be selected by State game administrators within a general framework of October 1 to January 15, 1956.

This year's framework represents a liberalization, of five days. Last year the "cutoff date" was January 10. Plans have been set up by the Service to study this five-day extension of the season to evaluate any adverse biological results and to estimate the effects of the later season on the take of birds.

Acting Secretary Davis emphasized that the basic data used to guide Director John L. Farley, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and his technical staff, in making their decisions resulted from the cooperative surveys of the wintering grounds and the breeding grounds of the birds which were made by Service biologists and game management agents, State game department technicians, wildlife experts of the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Provincial Game Branches, and field personnel in Canada of Ducks Unlimited and the Wildlife Management Institute.

In the course of formulating the basic regulations, Director Farley accorded full consideration to the opinions and recommendations of his Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

This Committee is composed of delegates of the National Waterfowl Council (whose membership is constituted of directors of State game departments), and representatives of the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Wildlife Federation, the Outdoor Writers Association of America, the National Audubon Society, the Izaak Walton League of America, and the Wildlife Society.

"As approved in their final form," said Director Farley, "this year's regulations do not represent the thought or philosophy of any one person but are truly the result of cooperative studies and combined thinking. They continue the Service's policy of providing the maximum harvest of migratory waterfowl that can be enjoyed continuously. Under favorable conditions, such as we have this year, we will continue by trial to determine what these maxima can be."

As the result of excellent production conditions on major portions of the northern breeding grounds this spring and summer, hunters in the Atlantic flyway will benefit by a 10-day extension of their season from the 60-day season of last year to 70 days this year.

Mississippi flyway hunters gain 15 days, with their season being increased from 55 days to 70 days.

Central flyway hunters also get a similar increase of 15 days for a 75-day season on ducks.

The season on geese in this flyway remains 60 days.

The Pacific flyway, which was the only flyway to get an increase last year, amounting to five days, retains the same 80-day season for this year because the number of available ducks will be about the same as last year.

Split seasons were again offered as options to the States, with the same 10 percent penalty in effect as last year. This year, however, the States are permitted to select split seasons of unequal periods.

General shooting hours will be from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset except in the Mississippi Flyway where shooting will cease one-half hour before sunset. This modification for the Mississippi Flyway has been adopted as a protection measure for the wood duck which is especially vulnerable in the late afternoon. This year the Service recommended that the practice of having a noon opening on the first day of the season, or on the second opening of a split season, be discontinued. The States, however, may "further restrict" the Federal regulations by establishing noon openings.

Following is a summary of the highlights of the amended regulations by flyways:

Atlantic Flyway: For ducks, geese, and coots, the States in this flyway, embracing Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia will have a season of 70 consecutive days, or two split seasons of equal or unequal length after subtracting the 10 percent penalty.

Daily bag and possession limits remain at 4 and 8 on ducks and 2 and 4 on geese.

The season on brant will be the same as for ducks and geese. Daily bag limit of 6 and possession limit of 6 are retained.

For wood ducks, the daily bag limit of one and possession limit of two remains unchanged.

Coot bag and possession limits remain the same as last year--10 and 10.

The season for jacksnipe, within the framework of the waterfowl season, will remain at 15 days, with bag and possession limits of 8.

American and red-breasted mergansers will be included in the regular daily bag limits. Only one hooded merganser, however, may be included in the daily bag and possession limits.

Mississippi Flyway: For ducks, geese, and coots, the States in this flyway of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin will have a 70-day straight, or two split seasons of equal or unequal length after taking the 10 percent penalty.

Bag and possession limits will remain unchanged at 4 and 8 for ducks and 5 and 5 for geese. (The limits for geese may not include more than 2 Canada or 2 white-fronts, or 2 of these in combination.) This season 1 wood duck will be permitted in the regular bag and possession limits. The season was closed last year on this species.

The 15-day jacksnipe season will continue, with dates to be within the waterfowl framework. Bag and possession limits remain at 8 birds.

Coot bag and possession limits remain unchanged--10 and 10.

Central Flyway: For ducks and coots, the States in this flyway which include Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming will have a 75-day straight season, or two split seasons, minus the 10 percent penalty.

The same bag and possession limits of 5 and 10 will prevail for ducks. Because of concern over the status of Richardson's and Great Basin Canada Geese, the Central Flyway Council proposed a goose season of 60 days, with a bag and possession limit of 5 (which may not include more than 2 Canadas or 2 white-fronts or 2 of these in combination), the season to be within the dates for taking ducks except that the goose season in no State (except Texas) would extend beyond December 31. In Texas it could run to January 15.

The 15-day jacksnipe season will continue, with bag and possession limits of 8.

Coot bag and possession limits remain unchanged--10 and 10.

Pacific Flyway: For ducks, geese and coots the States in this flyway of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington will continue to have an 80-day consecutive season or split periods of equal or unequal lengths.

As last year, all States in this flyway will have an option to choose a bag limit of ducks consisting of 7 a day or in possession, or 6 daily with 12 in possession, which may be increased to 10 a day or in possession, or 9 daily with 15 in possession, by including 3 "depredation birds" (pintails or widgeons) or 3 in the aggregate of both kinds.

Bag and possession limits for geese remain at 6 birds, but such limit shall not include more than 3 of the dark species. The bag limit on Canadas will be reduced to 2 birds in the counties of Yuma and Mojave, in Arizona; the entire State of Utah; the counties of Bear Lake, Caribou, and Bonneville, in Idaho; and the counties of Yamhill, Polk, Benton, Linn, and Lane, in Oregon. In California, in Fish and Game District 22 (as defined in the California code), the limit on Canada geese will be 1 bird.

The brant season in this flyway, in Oregon, California, and Washington, will remain the same as last year, with bag and possession limits of 3 birds.

The 15-day jacksnipe season remains unchanged, with bag and possession limits of 8 and 8.

Bag and possession limits for coots in this flyway remain at 25.

Bag limits on wood ducks remain unchanged.

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